

First record of Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus* in The Gambia

Anita and Heimo Mikkola

La première observation du Faucon kobez *Falco vespertinus* en Gambie est documentée. Il s'agissait d'un mâle adulte, survolant la côte gambienne en direction du nord à Cape Point, le 1^{er} mars 2001. Les observations antérieures dans les pays limitrophes sont brièvement examinées, ainsi que le statut et les mouvements de l'espèce en Afrique.

On 1 March 2001 at 19.00 hrs we observed an adult male Red-footed Falcon *Falco vespertinus* migrating north over our house at Cape Point, The Gambia. It followed the coastline at a height of c30 m, in purposeful flight with steady wingbeats. Our first impression was of a small, all-dark falcon about the size of African Hobby *F. cuvierii* and clearly smaller and more slender than Grey Kestrel *F. ardosiaceus*, with a much more buoyant flight. The latter two regularly occur in this area. Through binoculars the bright red feet and reddish lower belly and thighs contrasted conspicuously with the rest of the plumage, which was uniformly dark. There was no white on the underwing, thus excluding Amur Falcon *F. amurensis*. We are both familiar with the species from Hungary. This apparently constitutes the first record for The Gambia¹.

Red-footed Falcon is a widespread Palearctic migrant, which enters Africa principally through the eastern Mediterranean and Middle East, and winters mainly in southern Africa, most abundantly in south Angola, north Namibia and Botswana, where it arrives from late October^{3,6,9}. Return migration starts in late February and follows a more westerly course, crossing the Mediterranean further west from mid-April; its migration route thus describes a loop^{3,5}. It breeds from eastern Europe east to central Russia and extreme north-west China^{4,6}.

In West Africa the species is a rare to uncommon passage migrant almost throughout². In the westernmost countries it is invariably rare, with few records from Mauritania and Senegal, mostly along the coast, in September, November–January and March–April^{8,10}. It is slightly more frequent in Mali, mostly in the Sahel, where small groups have been recorded in September/October–April/May⁷.

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FAO Representation, Private Mail Bag 10. Banjul. The Gambia.